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Testimony Regarding S.B. No. 946, Section 29(b) Finance, Revenue and Bonding Committee Submitted by: Amy Blaymore Paterson, Esq., Executive Director March 9, 2015

Co-Chairs Fonfara, Berger, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for this opportunity to present testimony on behalf of the Connecticut Land Conservation Council (CLCC) in strong opposition to Section 29(b) of SB 946, An Act Concerning Revenue Items to Implement the Governor's Budget, which proposes a complete sweep of the Community Investment Act account from January 1, 2016 through June 30, 2017 into the General Fund.

CLCC works with Connecticut's land trusts (now numbering 137+), other conservation and advocacy organizations, government entities and landowners to increase the pace, quality, scale and permanency of land conservation in Connecticut while assuring the perpetual, high quality stewardship of conserved lands in the state.

The Community Investment Act (CIA)

Enacted with tremendous bipartisan support in 2005 to address the social and environmental impacts of suburban sprawl, the CIA provides increased funding for state land use programs for **open space conservation, farmland preservation/dairy production, historic properties preservation and affordable housing development**. Funded by a surcharge on local recording fees, the impact of the CIA on the economic well-being and overall quality of life in our communities has exceeded all expectations. Almost every town in Connecticut has benefited from the CIA.

According to figures compiled by a statewide CIA coalition, the CIA has funded over 1,100 projects, in 165 towns for a total of \$133 million invested in our communities. More specifically, the CIA investments in local farm businesses and land protection have contributed to the viability of the \$873 million outdoor recreation industry and the \$3.5 billion agricultural industry together generating 28,000 jobs. In addition, over 3,000 jobs were created in the affordable housing and historic preservation sector due to CIA projects, and 157 dairy farm businesses were saved with CIA support. The fact that those numbers continue to increase is a testament to the success and importance of the program.

The CIA is critical to land conservation

The CIA is the only *consistent* source of funding for the state's Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Grant Program (OSWA) – the state's matching grant program for land trusts, towns and water companies seeking to conserve open space. Since its inception, the CIA has provided \$17,340,039 to support the acquisition of 4,447 acres and 16 community gardens. (DEEP 2013 Annual Report to the Environment Committee) The 2014 OSWA grants which were announced



by Governor Malloy at the end of last year would permanently protect another 2,250 additional acres in 25 municipalities. Three DEEP staff positions are also funded through the CIA.

The sweep of the CIA account will undermine the administration, function and viability of the OSWA program, dealing a serious blow to the land conservation community's ability to protect land and help the state meet its statutory goal of conserving 21% of state lands by 2023 – a goal which the state is already not on track to meet even under current funding conditions. (Council on Environmental Quality 2013 Annual Report)

The sense of urgency created by S.B.946, Section 29(b) with respect to funding for future OSWA projects is exacerbated by the additional sweep of \$10 million from the CIA account from DEEP for “municipal open space grants” for the current fiscal year proposed under Governor's Bill No. 6825, Section 5 – raising deep concerns about the status of funding for projects pending under the current grant round.

Simply put, the magnitude of these proposed cuts is unprecedented, not only putting a halt to investments slated for projects under all four of the programs for which the CIA was created – land use programs with few, if any, other sources of funding -- but also setting a very dangerous and perhaps irreversible precedent for future sweeps of the fund.

On behalf of CLCC, together with our partners in farmland/dairy support, historic properties and affordable housing, we respectfully urge the Committee to oppose these proposed cuts to the Community Investment Act. Thank you for this opportunity to comment on this uniquely important funding program. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have regarding this testimony or land conservation efforts in Connecticut.